

## No Pain, No Pain

Trade your flab for six-pack abs. Move the bulge from your belly to your biceps. Exchange a middle that jiggles for pecs that flex. And do all of this . . . without working out! That's right: researchers say we soon may be able to buff up and slim down by performing the one exercise most Americans excel at: putting something in our mouths and swallowing.

Scientists at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies claim they have exercise captured in a capsule. Mice who popped the magic pill upped their metabolism, dropped their body fat and increased their endurance, all without so much as touching one of those little stationary wheels. The inventors say they aim to benefit cardiac patients who cannot engage in aerobic activity but clearly the product has other commercial possibilities.

Of course spiritual snake-oil salesman have been touting similar nostrums for ages. Every era has its theological mountebanks who proffer a patented spiritual elixir guaranteed to provide immediate maturity without significant exertion. A secret doctrine, an ecstatic experience, a weekend retreat to cop a quick Sermon on the Rocky Mountain High, a prayer cloth used to polish the windshield of Reverend Rolex's limo – they all seduce shallow believers with the shiny promise of going from zero to sainthood in no time at all.

The New Testament, I should point out, knows nothing of this. Scripture preaches a different gospel, one in which the good news comes complete with the good fight and every hilltop sports a cross. In describing the Christian life, the authors of Scripture show a marked preference for Greek roots drawn from athletic competition, words that give us English terms like gymnasium (1 Tim 4.7, Heb 8.14, 12.11) and agony (Phil 1.30, Col 2.1, 1 Th 2.2, 1 Ti 6.12, 2 Ti 4.7, Heb 12.1).

So instead of the easy ecstasy of effortless spirituality, let me offer a few agonizing drills for those willing to pay the price for a muscular Christianity:

- **Pontius Pilates:** This exercise involves keeping one's mouth shut in the presence of power and enduring wrong with dignity.
  1. Place the lips together.
  2. Leave them that way.

- **Gut-wrenches:** Unlike stomach crunches, this exercise stirs the inner organs with the compassion of Christ.
  1. Stand with back straight, eyes open and arms outstretched before the wretched raggedness of someone who has gotten just what his sin deserves.
  2. Embrace him anyway. (For a demonstration see Lk 15.20.)
  
- **Deep-knee bends:**
  1. Flex both legs until your knees touch the floor.
  2. Stay there.

These work best if done daily in high repetitions. If you experience side-effects such as wounded flesh, mortified pride, and crucifixion, report to your local church for treatment.

All Worked Up,  
Doug